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EMMANUEL MACRON

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKYY

EUROPEAN LEADERS TO GATHER IN PARIS TODAY FOR SUMMIT ON UKRAINE

French President Emmanuel Macron will host leaders from key European countries on Monday to discuss the Ukraine war and the continent's security

EUROPE JITTERY AS U.S. WEIGHS DEAL WITH RUSSIA

The summit will focus on the future of European security as the US pursues a deal with Russia to end the war in Ukraine. European leaders fear Donald Trump may agree to Putin's demands to limit NATO presence in eastern Europe and the US involvement in the continent's security. Leaders of Britain, Germany, Poland, Italy and Denmark will attend

CALL FOR MAXIMUM PRESSURE ON MOSCOW

- Ukraine president Volodymyr Zelenskyy has vowed not to respect a truce negotiated by the US and Russia without Ukraine's input
- Finland's president said Europe must rearm Ukraine and put "maximum pressure on Russia" through sanctions and asset freezes in the run-up to negotiations sought by the US

$52 bn

THE SIZE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION'S MILITARY ASSISTANCE FOR UKRAINE

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

ROW OVER HANDCUFFS, TURBAN

3rd aircraft carrying 112 illegal Indians touches down in Amritsar

HARPREET BAJWA @ Chandigarh

THE third batch of 112 Indians deported from the United States aboard a military aircraft landed late on Sunday night at Amritsar's Sri Guru Ram Dass International airport.

Among the 112 deportees, 31 are from Punjab, 44 from Haryana, 33 from Gujarat, two from Uttar Pradesh and one each from Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. Two women from Punjab were among the deportees.

After security clearance, immigration, and background checks, efforts were being made to send the deportees back to their respective states. Those from Punjab were being taken to their homes in vehicles arranged by the state government. Haryana government had sent two private luxury bus to transport its residents back home.

This was the second deportation flight after the meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump in Washington DC last week.

The deportation of Indians is part of an ongoing crackdown by US authorities against illegal immigration.

Several deportees aboard the US aircraft who landed on Saturday night said they were in shackles during the journey and that 6 Sikh youths were not allowed to wear turbans.

Daljit Singh of Kurala Kalan village in Hoshiarpur said they were handcuffed and their legs chained during the journey. "Our legs were chained and hands cuffed throughout the journey. There were three women and three children on board who were not cuffed," Singh said. The shackles were removed before the aircraft landed in Amritsar, he said. Singh had taken the 'Dunki route', Sourav (20), who reached Chandiwala in Punjab's Ferozepur district on Sunday, said, "We were handcuffed and our legs were chained."

Harjit Singh, who hails from Khanowal Ghuman village in Gurdaspur district, said he was kept at a detention centre and handcuffed on the flight.

Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandak Committee (SGPC) member Gurcharan Singh condemned the treatment meted out to Sikh youths, and said it would take the matter of sending Sikhs without turbans with US officials. P10

Akali Dal slams Mann

Senior Shiromani Akali Dal leader Bikram Singh Majithia said Bhagwant Mann and his ministers are concerned about Punjab's image but are quiet on Sikh youths being deported without turbans

LoC FIRING

INDIA, PAK EXCHANGE FIRE IN J-K'S POONCH

A brief exchange of fire took place about 11 am on Sunday when Pakistani troops fired on an Indian post. The fire was retaliated appropriately by the Indian Army, an official said

Confusion over trains led to stampede

Police: 2 trains with identical names on different platforms led to confusion among passengers before the tragedy

Personal belongings of passengers caught in Saturday's stampede lie scattered on a stairway leading to platforms 14 and 15 | x

RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR AND SHEKHAR SINGH @ New Delhi

MISCOMMUNICATION, inefficient crowd control measures, confusion over train names are among the major factors that led to the stampede at the New Delhi Railway Station on Saturday night, which killed at least 18 people, 14 of them women, and injured another 15 passengers.

Over 2,500 passengers booked tickets at New Delhi on Saturday within a span of just one hour, which could also have resulted in overcrowding.

"As 2,600 more tickets were booked within an hour at New Delhi, and there was a surge in crowd numbers for Prayagraj, a special train was announced from Platform 12," the rail ministry said. While the ministry said there was no platform change or cancellation of any special trains, vendors and porters at the railway station claimed an announcement was made about platform change. Following this, they said, passengers waiting at Platform 14 rushed towards Platform 16, resulting in the stampede.

The Delhi Police, which conducted the initial probe, said two trains with identical names—both bound for Prayagraj—led to chaos among thousands of Maha Kumbh devotees. According to senior police officers, an announcement for the arrival of the Prayagraj Special at Platform 16 created confusion among passengers waiting for the Prayagraj Express at Platform 14. In the rush to board what they assumed was their train, a large section of the crowd ran towards Platform 16, triggering a deadly crush.

Rly forms high-level probe into tragedy

Railway ministry has set up an inquiry into the stampede. The probe panel comprises Pankaj Gangwar, Principal Chief Security Commissioner, and Nar Singh, Principal Chief Commercial Manager, Northern Railway

"There were already four trains scheduled to depart for Prayagraj that night, and three of them were delayed. This caused extreme overcrowding. The announcement further fueled panic, as many passengers believed they had missed their original train and rushed in the wrong direction," said a senior police officer.

The government announced a ₹10 lakh compensation for the families of the deceased, ₹2.5 lakh for those seriously injured, and ₹1 lakh for those with minor injuries.

Despite the stampede, the New Delhi station remained overcrowded on Sunday, with platforms flooded with thousands of passengers trying to board trains to Prayagraj and other destinations. In the wake of the tragedy, there was heavy police presence at the station. The foot-over-bridge and other connecting areas between Platforms 14 and 15 were manned by RPF officers to ensure safe movement of passengers. P9

Measures to ease Kumbh travel

Railway ministry said all special trains to Prayagraj will be run only from platform No 16. "So, passengers shall come and go from the Ajmeri Gate side of the New Delhi railway station," the ministry said

Security beefed up at rly stations

Security has been beefed up at key railway stations including Prayagraj, Varanasi, Ayodhya, Kanpur, Lucknow and Mirzapur following the Delhi stampede, officials said

Sack the minister: Congress

Opposition parties alleged the stampede was due to poor management by the authorities. Targeting the railway minister, the Congress urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to sack him

Unsettling calm at ground zero hours after deadly rush

RAJESH KUMAR THAKUR @ New Delhi

SUNDAY morning brought an eerie calm to New Delhi railway station, where just hours earlier a chaotic stampede had claimed 18 lives and left countless others shaken.

Although there was no significant crowd until about 9.30 am on Sunday, the aftermath of the stampede was evident. Toys, infant milk bottles and medicines were among items strewn across the platforms.

"It was total confusion," said a vendor at the station. "When a special train to Prayagraj was announced from platform 16, passengers rushed towards it. That's when the stampede occurred", said a coolie.

The chaos that resulted between platforms 14 and 15, and on the foot-over bridges left scores of passengers crushed. Scattered slippers, torn bags, and abandoned belongings lay scattered across the staircase, the bridge, and platforms 14 and 15 — silent witnesses to the tragedy. "I've been a vendor here for the last 15 years, but I've never seen such a heart-wrenching scene," said Chetan, a local vendor.

Mohan, a cleaning staff at the station, described it as "one of the worst" tragedies he had witnessed in the past 10 years. "There were personal belongings everywhere. People had no time to gather their things; they just ran for their lives," he said, with tears in his eyes.

On Sunday, a majority of passengers returning from Prayagraj alighted at platforms number 14 and 15, which were unusually clean. Some inquired about the casualties, before disappearing into the crowd towards the exit. Reena Devi, 55, from Sarita Vihar, and her husband Dinkar, 59, said they had not encountered problems at the confluence of the rivers in Prayagraj, but did face a lot of difficulty aboard the train to Delhi due to overcrowding.

"I saw women fall to the ground, only to be trampled over. People didn't even realise they were stepping on others who were still alive

Dharamji Mandal, Bookstall owner

US cancels $21 mn grant meant for voter turnout in India

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

THE newly-created US Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) headed by billionaire Elon Musk said it has cancelled the previous administration's $21 million funding to support efforts to increase voter turnout in India.

The funding was part of a larger $486 million allocation to the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening. "US taxpayer dollars were going to be spent on the following items, all which have been cancelled," it said, giving a list of funding commitments that stand cancelled.

The list also includes $29 million to 'strengthen political landscape' in Bangladesh and $20 million for 'fiscal federalism' in Nepal.

Reacting to the announcement, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) said it is proof of external interference in India's electoral process. "$21M for voter turnout? This definitely is external interference in India's electoral process. Who gains from this? Not the ruling party for sure!," Amit Malviya, BJP's national spokesperson, said.

DOGE was created by President Donald Trump to reduce government spending.

IPL TO BEGIN ON MARCH 22

The latest edition of the Indian Premier League will begin at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata, the venue of the defending champions. The 74-match, two-month long competition will also conclude at the same venue on May 25.

KOLKATA TO FACE BENGALURU IN OPENER

The defending champions, as is customary, will kick-start the league with the opener against Bengaluru on March 22. Both sides will have new captains

HYDERABAD AND KOLKATA VENUES FOR KNOCKOUTS AND FINALS

Hyderabad, 2024's losing finalists, will host the first qualifier and the eliminator on May 20 and May 21 before the caravan moves to the home of the current champions for the league's closing stages on May 23 and 25

GROUP 1	GROUP 2
Kolkata Knight Riders, Royal Challengers Bengaluru, Rajasthan Royals, Chennai Super Kings, Punjab Kings	Sunrisers Hyderabad, Delhi Capitals, Gujarat Titans, Mumbai Indians, Lucknow Super Giants

KEY DATES

May 20: Qualifier 1 | May 21: Eliminator | May 23: Qualifier 2 | May 25: Final

Man held for cheating KAS officer with fake CM's letter

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

A 46-year-old man was arrested for faking a chief minister's office letter and forging Siddaramaiah's signature to cheat a Karnataka Administrative Service (KAS) officer, who is posted as an assistant commissioner (AC) in the city and wanted a transfer.

The accused, Raghavendra, is a resident of Cantonment and hails from Haveri. He earlier worked as a staff member for the private personal assistant of an MLA. He was arrested recently after the Secretary of the Vidhana Soudha filed a complaint against the use of a fake CM's office letter and signature.

The KAS officer met Raghavendra for the transfer as the latter claimed to have connections with government officials and politicians. Raghavendra assured him of a recommendation letter for the posting and demanded a few lakhs. The officer allegedly paid the money, after which Raghavendra gave him a fake letter with the forged signature of the chief minister. When the AC sent the letter to an official through Whatsapp, it was found to be fake, the police said.

The police learnt during questioning that he had cheated many people in the past, but this was the first complaint filed against him. The police, however, did not disclose the exact amount paid by the KAS officer. Raghavendra was booked for cheating and forgery.

EXPRESS READ

Kuruburu Shanthakumar airlifted to B'luru, now in Manipal hospital

Bengaluru: Farmer leader Kuruburu Shanthakumar, who was seriously injured in a road accident near Patiala in Punjab, was airlifted to Bengaluru on Sunday. He has been admitted to Manipal Hospital, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's office confirmed. Shanthakumar, who suffered a severe spinal injury, had been receiving treatment at a hospital in Patiala since the accident three days ago | P3

BJP to decide Delhi CM today, oath-taking likely on Feb 18

New Delhi: Following a historic triumph in the Delhi Assembly elections, the BJP is all set to hold a crucial meeting on Monday at the party headquarters in Delhi to choose the next CM. Sources said the BJP is likely to choose a leader from its winning MLAs to avoid the need for byelections and an oath-taking ceremony will be held on February 18. Party officials have confirmed that 14 names have been sent to the central leadership.

ATS flags B'deshi terrorists entering J'khand for training

Ranchi: In a shocking input received by Jharkhand Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS), some terrorists entered the state from Bangladesh and returned after providing training to some people in Pakur as part of a conspiracy. Jamat-ul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) terrorist Abdul Mammun reportedly crossed the border from Bangladesh and reached Pakur on January 6, where he trained 15 members of JAHA-India." | P10

WONDER WOMAN

Gowri brings Ganga to earth, in her backyard

SUBHASH CHANDRA NS @ Sirsi (Uttara Kannada)

UNABLE to afford a trip to Prayagraj for the Mahakumbh Mela, 57-year-old Gowri has done something unique. She has dug a 40-foot-deep well in her backyard, bringing "Ganga" to earth. She has done it all by herself, and this is not her first time.

In mid-2024, she dug a well to quench the thirst of Anganwadi children and staff amid opposition from the district administration.

"One has to be lucky to go to Mahakumbh. I cannot afford it (Gowri owns a small patch of agriculture land which helps earn her livelihood). I decided to dig a well here and bring Ganga," she told *The New Indian Express*.

She has now dug 40 feet deep and is happy that there is sufficient water in the well.

"I am planning to take a dip on Maha Shivaratri day later this month," she said.

Gowri had heard of the Mahakumbh Mela in December, but realised that she did not have enough money to travel to Prayagraj. That was when she decided to dig the well and started immediately on December 15.

According to her relatives and neighbours, she worked for nearly 6-8 hours a day — digging and dumping the soil. She completed the well on February 15, exactly two months after she started her effort.

Digging a well without the help of anybody is not new to Gowri. With this, she has dug four wells all by herself -- one in her field for cultivation, another to quench the thirst of the people of her village and the third one at the Ganesh Nagar Anganwadi School in Sirsi in mid-2024.

The Anganwadi well was strongly objected to by the district administration after the media reported about her task. The then deputy commissioner ordered the digging to stop at once.

District in-charge minister Mankal Vaidya first honoured her, but later asked her to stop it. But Gowri completed the well after she was supported by then Uttara Kannada Member of Parliament Ananth Kumar Hegde.

He ensured that she completed the well. She had then dug a 45-ft-deep well and it is still in use.

In case of the new well, which she has again dug all alone, Gowri expressed her happiness that she found water in the well.

One has to be lucky to go to Mahakumbh. I cannot afford it. I decided to dig a well here and bring Ganga. I am planning to take a dip on Maha Shivaratri day later this month

Gowri of Sirsi in Uttara Kannada district

Gowri works on her 40-foot-deep well in Sirsi, Uttara Kannada | EXPRESS